

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHPG #0380/01 1721110
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201110Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0422
INFO RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0050
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA 2942
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 1732

UNCLAS PRAGUE 000380

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

INL FOR BROWNE, EUR/NCE FOR TRATENSEK, EMBASSY VIENNA FOR ISRAEL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: BEHIND THE NUMBERS: THE CHANGING DRUG SITUATION IN THE
CZECH REPUBLIC

REF: SECSTATE 00686
PRAGUE 00072

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Czech parliament is considering changes to its drug legislation. The proposed changes and other recent developments have raised concerns that official anti-drug efforts are failing to keep pace with rising demand caused by greater affluence, lower drug costs, and changing cultural norms. Indeed, usage rates of some drugs are among the highest in Europe. The country's recent entry into the border-free Schengen zone will also likely hamper anti-drug efforts. Counter-narcotics specialists maintain these problems will continue to grow unless the country adopts stiffer drug penalties, cracks down on the sale of legal pre-cursor drugs, and increases prevention efforts. END SUMMARY

THE PENDING LEGISLATION

¶2. (SBU) The proposed changes are part of a broader attempt to revise the entire Czech criminal code, similar to efforts which failed in 2005. The changes to the sections dealing with drugs are based on recommendations of the government's Anti-Narcotics Council. The Council consists of representatives from the Ministries of Health, Labor and Social Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Education, and Interior, and is headed by the Prime Minister. With regard to fines and sentences for drug offenses, the proposed bill would draw a distinction between so-called "hard drugs," such as cocaine, LSD, and heroin, and "soft drugs," such as marijuana and methamphetamines. The bill, which has been approved by the cabinet, still faces several legislative hurdles, but it could be considered in final form by the full parliament sometime this fall.

¶3. (SBU) Under the proposed new code, an individual would be able to grow a set number of marijuana plants (reportedly three) for "personal use" and carry .5 grams of methamphetamine without penalty; exceeding that limit would carry a maximum penalty of six months in prison. Trading in other drugs would continue to be punished by up to 5 years' imprisonment. The government's approach reflects a growing trend among EU member states to reorient resources away from so-called "social drugs" and focus on other illicit drugs considered more dangerous. For the first time, the use and sale of anabolic steroids would also be banned under the bill.

RIISING USE OF MOST DRUGS

¶4. (SBU) Embassy officers recently met the head of the Czech National Anti-Narcotics Police Unit, Jiri Komorous, and his deputies, to discuss the current drug situation in the Czech Republic. Komorous confirmed the high rates of drug use reported by the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the EU body that monitors drug patterns in member states. Its 2007 statistics showed that the Czech Republic had the highest

rate of marijuana use (28%) and the highest rate of methamphetamine use (12%) in Europe. Cocaine use, while low, was up sharply over recent years. Conversely, heroin use had fallen due to a long-term law enforcement campaign targeting Kosovar Albanian gangs, the chief suppliers of the drug in the country. Komorous' unit has also worked closely with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) regional office in Vienna to support investigations of mutual concern. Additionally, Komorous stated that personnel reforms instituted by the current Minister of Interior Ivan Langer had not impacted his unit (Ref B.)

15. (SBU) Much of the explanation for the continued prevalence of marijuana, especially among young people, lies in how the current criminal law treats usage. Owing to a vaguely-worded "personal use" exemption legislators inserted into the current drug legislation, which came into effect in 1999, individuals may carry an undefined amount of the drug on their person without penalty. Without binding guidance on what constitutes permissible amounts, arrests for the drug's usage are rare and subject to challenge. Accordingly, there is effectively no legal deterrent to engaging in small-scale use of the drug.

16. (SBU) Professor of Education at Charles University, Jana Stara, blames the media for marijuana's popularity. She stated that Czech media outlets frequently portray marijuana as no worse than alcohol and neglect to discuss the possible harmful health consequences. She cautioned that marijuana seized today has been shown to contain THC levels four to five times higher than what was contained in marijuana available 10-20 years ago. This observation was confirmed by Komorous. As a result, today's marijuana is much more dangerous.

17. (SBU) Statistics for methamphetamine (locally known as pervitin) also represent the highest rates in Europe. Linkage between cold medications and methamphetamine production was publicly laid bare March 13, when the president of the Czech Pharmaceutical Association, Stanislav Havlicek, stated that "more than 80% of cold medications sold in the Czech Republic is being used for the clandestine manufacture of pervitin." He blamed the combination of high profits and lax regulatory oversight for the problem. Indeed, according to the State Institute for Controlled Substances (SUKL), just 12 pharmacies sold one quarter of the 4 million cold medication packets sold last year alone.

18. (SBU) The head of the Ministry of Interior's Policy and Analysis Unit, Marcel Wolgemuth, believes the bad publicity generated by Havlicek's comments may finally force government action. He stated that a subgroup of the Anti-Narcotics Council has been established to weigh options, including limiting the number of cold medications sold, requiring a prescription for more than one packet, and establishing a searchable database for all transactions. Czech police also appear to have stepped up enforcement. On June 5, Czech police announced charges against a pharmacist in connection with allegedly supplying up to 25,000 boxes of cold medications to a suspected meth cook in Chomutov, a city in northern Czech Republic near the German border.

19. (SBU) While cocaine use remains low, its popularity has steadily risen over the last several years. Due in part to the appreciating Czech currency, the price of a gram of cocaine has dropped in recent years to 1000-1500 Kcs (\$60-95), making it much more affordable to buy. Cheaper air travel and the country's recent entry into the border-free Schengen zone have also made the drug more widely available. Factors retarding the drug's further reach include its still-relatively high price and active cooperation between Czech police and agencies from the drug-producing countries of the Andes.

PREVENTION

110. (SBU) Experts on drug treatment and prevention stressed to embassy officers that primary prevention held the greatest promise for reversing these drug trends. On April 28, Prevention Center (Prev-Centrum), a drug treatment and counseling clinic in Prague, released the findings of its own long-term study. The survey, which used control groups and followed hundreds of students in Prague for five years, found that primary prevention played a significant role

in deferring the first use of illegal drugs. In terms of students from broken homes, prevention was the leading factor in foregoing or delaying drug use. Surveys conducted by Professor Stara reached similar conclusions. However, both Prev-Centrum and Professor Stara lamented the lack of sufficient public funding going into primary prevention programs and generally declining support from the state, something the MOI's Wolgemuth disputed. A Czech regulation that requires the MOI to vet all NGOs proposing to provide prevention training may also be complicating matters.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) The overall levels of drug use and official efforts to lower penalties for carrying marijuana and methamphetamines are not encouraging trends. However, our discussions revealed that the Czech law enforcement team fighting the spread of narcotics is professional and clearly committed to its mission. We have sought to support Czech police through various training and exchange programs, including programs offered by DEA in Vienna. These programs have been welcomed by the Czechs, and we continue to receive requests for other opportunities. Post therefore encourages State and other agencies to continue targeting Czech Republic for this form of assistance.

¶12. (U) DEA Vienna provided clearance this cable.

GRABER